DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 031 503 TE 001 512

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A Brief Note on Censorship and Junior High Schools in Arizona: 1966-68.

Pub Date Apr 69

Note-6p.

Journal Cit-Arizona English Bulletin; v11 n3 p26-30 Apr 1969

EDRS Price MF-$0.25 HC-$0.40

Descriptors-Academic Freedom, Administrator Attitudes, Booklists, *Censorship, English Instruction, *Junior High Schools, Moral Issues, Reading Materials, *Reading Material Selection, School Community Relationship, *School Policy, Secondary School Teachers, Teacher Attitudes, *Teaching Conditions

Identifiers-*Arizona

Information on censorship problems in Arizona junior high schools (grades 7-8) was gathered through a questionnaire survey of 50 English teachers in 39 schools. (See also ED 026 396 for information on high school censorship problems in Arizona.) Statistical data were collected on the number of schools, teachers, and books involved in direct or indirect censorship; the outcomes of censorship cases; the educational backgrounds of teachers; school policies in handling objections to books; and the degree to which teachers felt censorship was a problem in their individual communities and in the state. Teachers' written comments on censorship and a list of books, together with the specific objections to the books, were obtained. Implications drawn from the survey were (1) censorship definitely exists as a problem in junior high schools, but most books were defensible; (2) too few junior high schools have written policies for handling censorship; (3) many teachers fell that administrators would not support them in censorship cases; and (4) most junior high school English teachers are aware of censorship dangers but tend to believe that censorship happens only to others. (LH)

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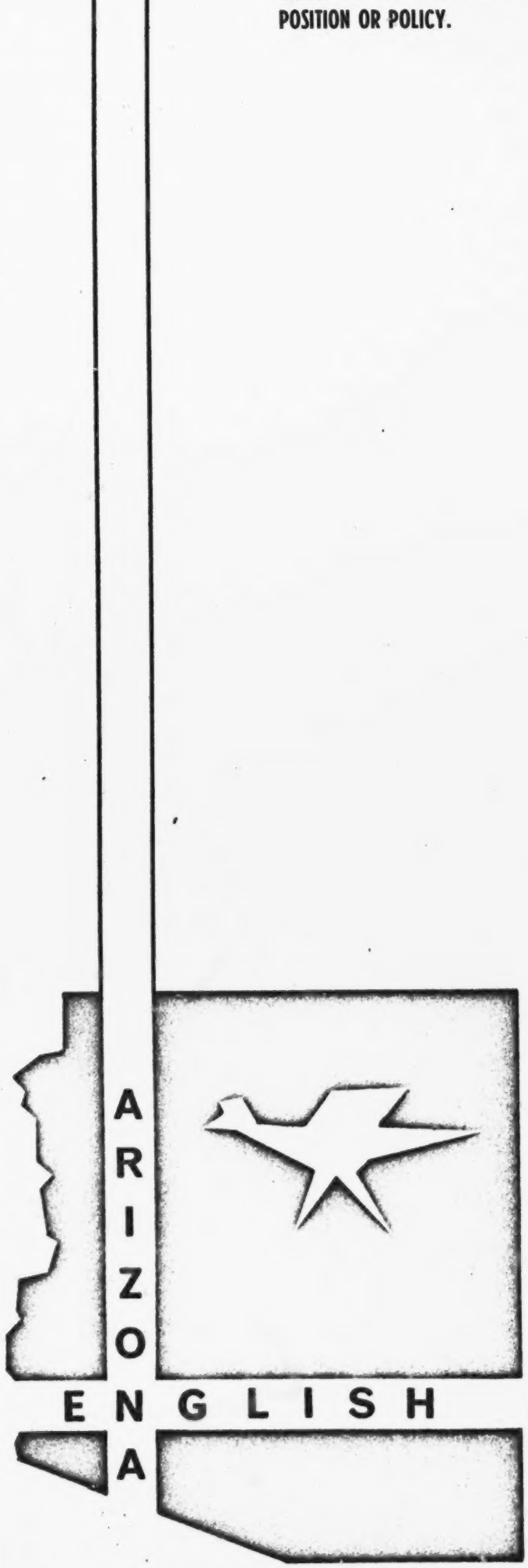

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TEACHING ENGLISH IN GRADES 7 - 8

Volume II - - - Number 3

April 1969

A BRIEF NOTE ON CENSORSHIP AND JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOLS IN ARIZONA: 1966-1968

Kenneth L. Donelson, ASU

In her study of censorship across the country, Dr. Nyla Ahrens noted that teachers likely to be censored were "more apt to be senior high school teachers, especially teachers of eleventh and twelfth grade classes; less apt to teach in junior high school." (CENSORSHIP AND THE TEACHER OF ENGLISH: A QUESTIONNAIRE SURVEY OF A SELECTED SAMPLE OF SECONDARY SCHOOL TEACHERS OF ENGLISH, a doctoral dissertation at Teachers College, Columbia University, 1965, p. 89). The following comments concern the survey of junior high school English teachers and their problems with censorship. These notes should be regarded as an addendum to the article "Censorship and Arizona Schools: 1966-1968" which appeared in the February 1969 issue of the ARIZONA ENGLISH BULLETIN.

Readers are warned that the survey was primarily aimed at uncovering problems of censorship in grades 9-12, and the sample of English teachers in grades 7-8 is quite small (N=50) and probably untrustworthy. Hence, the notes that follow should be taken as suggestive and in no sense final. Readers should note the procedure in the article cited above as the approach to the survey. The fact that the percentages in the survey of secondary English teachers and in the survey of junior high English teachers are roughly the same is probably attributable to the small sample taken. Again, the three most important items in the questionnaire were these:

Item no. 19. During the last two years, has anyone objected to or asked for the removal of any book or books which you have used or recommended to your students? (following item 19 were items asking who had made the objection, how the objection was made, what the disposition of the case was, etc.). Teachers who answered yes to item 19 will be called the DIRECT CENSORSHIP group.

Item no. 30. Do you know of any books that have been the source of objections in your school but in classes other than your own? (space followed item 30 to allow for details) Teachers answering yes to item 30 will be referred to as the INDIRECT CENSORSHIP group.

Item no. 39. In the last two years, have you used or recommended any book for which you anticipated possible objections and for which no objection arose? Teachers answering yes to item 39 will be referred to as ANTICIPATED CENSORSHIP group.

DATA FROM THE SURVEY:

1. Number of schools sent questionnaire: 39
2. Number of schools responding: 39 (100%)
3. Number of schools (N=39) with at least one response of DIRECT or INDIRECT CENSORSHIP: 16 (41.03%)
   (The survey of secondary English teachers revealed 44.44% CENSORSHIP)
4. Number of individuals sent questionnaires: 50
5. Number of individuals who responded: 43 (86%)
6. Number of respondents (N=43) reporting DIRECT CENSORSHIP: 3 (6.98%)
7. In addition to those teachers reporting DIRECT CENSORSHIP (N=3), number of respondents reporting no DIRECT CENSORSHIP but reporting INDIRECT CENSORSHIP: 13, or a total of 16 (37.21%) reporting some form of censorship in their schools. (The survey of secondary English teachers revealed 46.43% CENSORSHIP)
8. In addition to those reporting DIRECT CENSORSHIP and INDIRECT CENSORSHIP (N=16) number of respondents reporting no DIRECT CENSORSHIP and no INDIRECT CENSORSHIP but reporting ANTICIPATED CENSORSHIP: 6, or a total of 22 reporting some censorship or worry about censorship in their schools (51.16%).
9. Number of respondents reporting no censorship of any kind: 21 (48.84%)
10. Number of schools (N=39) with some written policy for handling objections to books: 4 (10.26%)
    (The survey of secondary English teachers revealed 30%)

11. Number of schools (N=39) reporting a closed shelf or faculty shelf: 11 (28.21%). (The survey of secondary English teachers revealed 40%)
12. Number of books involved in DIRECT or INDIRECT CENSORSHIP: 16
A list of books, reasons for the objections, objectors, and results will be found at the end of this article.
13. Number of incidents of DIRECT or INDIRECT CENSORSHIP of books reported: 21
14. Of the incidents reported (N=21)
Number of books retained: 11
Number of incidents still in progress or outcome unsure: 1
Number of books banned, removed, lost (?), hidden, etc.: 9
15. Of the 16 teachers reporting DIRECT CENSORSHIP or INDIRECT CENSORSHIP (each of these 16 teachers was from a different school; hence 16 schools are involved), number of schools in which at least one book was banned, removed, lost (?), hidden, etc.: 7

The following summarizes data from a number of items. Because the sample was admittedly small and because there were very few junior high English teachers who reported DIRECT CENSORSHIP (N=3), no attempt was made to separate those teachers who had been involved with censorship from those free of such attacks. Hence, the following information is suggestive of problems for all teachers of English in the junior high school.

16. What was your undergraduate major?
English: 16
Elementary Education: 12
Social Studies: 6
Home Economics: 3
Music: 1
Classics: 1
Art: 1
Physical Education: 1
Spanish: 1
Industrial Arts: 1
17. What is your highest degree?
Bachelors: 19
Masters: 23
18. Does your school have a written policy for handling objections to books?
Yes: 4 (3 with a form like the NCTE "Right to Read" statement, 1 unsure)
No: 20
Don't Know: 17
19. Assuming that someone would object to your administrator about a book, how would you guess that he would handle the case? The quotation followed by a number indicates how many answered the item in a similar manner.
"Our school has a form that must be completed by the person objecting." --2
"He would uphold the English teacher." --11
"There would be a conference with the parents, the principal, and the teacher involved who would talk about the problem." --9
"We would follow the recommended procedure." --1
"The parents would go to the top with any complaint. The teacher concerned would receive a message through channels -- Superintendent to Principal to Teacher." --3
"I hope that he would use the recommended policy." --1
"He would trust my judgment completely." --1
BUT NOTE THESE:
"If the book offended the administration, it would probably be removed by the principal and/or the librarian." --5
"I don't have the faintest idea what would happen." --2
"The principal would decide what he would do." --8
"I feel I would be asked to withdraw the book and say that its selection was incorrect -- a classic case of a cover-up; the philosophy here is 'don't rock the boat.' " --3

20. Does your school have a closed shelf or a faculty shelf?
    Yes: 14
    No: 24
    Don't Know: 3
21. Does censorship represent a potentially serious problem in your school?
    Yes: 9 No: 33
22. Does censorship represent a potentially serious problem in your community?
    Yes: 15 No: 26
23. Does censorship represent a potentially serious problem in Arizona?
    Yes: 29 No: 9
24. What additional comments about censorship would you like to make?
    "Censorship is always a potential problem for English teachers." -- 2
    "Colleges need to alert future English teachers to the problems of censorship." -- 3
    "English teachers need to get lay people interested in and aware of the problem of censorship." -- 3
    "English teachers should know and use the "Student's Right to Read" and the policy in that booklet." -- 2
    "The AETA should devise a statewide policy statement on censorship to help students, English teachers, and administrators." -- 13

    NOTE THESE:

    "Librarians are now in a position to censor requests for AV materials (films, records, filmstrips, etc.) since the TITLE material requests must go through them." -- 1
    "If money were available so I could purchase some books that I want, I'm sure there might be a problem." -- 1
    "There are too many English teachers in the junior high schools who have neither a major nor a minor in English. They are either unprepared to excite students about literature or they have no idea about the problems and pitfalls of book selection and censorship." -- 3
    "We won't have many problems with censorship as long as English teachers stick to their traditional teaching approaches and their curriculum guides. Depressingly enough, I know of no English teachers in my school who could even cause a censorship problem. They pride themselves on their freedom which they never use. They brag about their freedom from censorship, yet no one would censor anything they ever taught." -- 1
    "What's to censor when English teachers stick to the READER'S DIGEST, workbooks, sentence diagrams, and other things not quite so exciting?" -- 1

    AND NOTE THIS COMMENT IF ANY READER WISHES TO PLAY GOD:

    "A list of all the good books for use in junior high schools should be published. That way junior high school English teachers could defend the book if it were on the list and they could be sure to use only books on that list. Such a list should be distributed to all schools." -- 1

    AND FINALLY NOTE THESE COMMENTS:

    One junior high English teacher attempted to excite her apathetic class by having them work on a slang dictionary. Although her students did become interested, she was asked by her administrator to withdraw the dictionary from the students because of some words and definitions, but his major complaint "was that the cover (adorned with a flower) was an indication that the 'school is condoning the hippie movement.' "
    "I feel that we are overlooking a form of censorship which affects each of us -- namely that censorship applied by state boards in the adoption of texts. To me, the problem lies in the censorship imposed by high officials of public education who meet one time each year to adopt textbooks and who probably do not realize they are censors, simply because they have never seen a text written in any other way than that which stresses 'white, Anglo-Saxon, Protestant' background."

BOOKS OBJECTED TO, EITHER DIRECT OR INDIRECT CENSORSHIP:

Author and Title	No. of Objections and Objector	Objection	Result
FACTS OF LIFE AND LOVE FOR TEEN-AGERS	1 ?	?	retained
Golding, LORD OF THE FLIES	2 ?	?	1 retained 1 removed
Hemingway, THE OLD MAN AND THE SEA	1 ?	"use of the word whore"	retained
Huxley, BRAVE NEW WORLD	1 ?	?	retained
Lee, TO KILL A MOCKINGBIRD	3 parents	"Eighth graders should not read such books"	2 retained 1 removed
Levin, ROSEMARY'S BABY	1 parent	"Not proper material for eighth graders"	no action
Michner, FIRES OF SPRING	1 mother	"Not proper material for eighth graders"	no action
Mitchell, GONE WITH THE WIND	1 parent	"Eighth graders should not read such books."	retained
Pasternak, DR. ZHIVAGO	1 parent	"nasty book"	child chose another book.
Poe, "Tell-Tale Heart"	1 parent	"child was frightened by the story"	retained
Salinger, CATCHER IN THE RYE	2 parents	"dirty book"	2 removed
TEEN-AGE TALES	1 teacher	"stories too romantic and might corrupt students"	teacher refused to let students use book.
Twain, HUCKLEBERRY FINN	2 parents	"stereotype of Black people"	1 removed 1 ?
West, THE CHILEKINGS	1 parent	"rebellion, sex"	principal removed book from shelf

West, CRESS DELAHANTY	1	principal	"Cress undressing in front of a mirror"	principal refused to let book be placed on the shelf
"Any books about Negroes"	1	librarian	"objectionable"	never purchased

Compare the titles in the list above with the titles in the following list. The following books were listed as those works which teachers had used or recommended and for which they anticipated possible objections and for which no objections arose. Comparison of the two lists may reassure English teachers that some good literature is being taught or recommended in Arizona. Comparison may reassure the teacher who is fearful of reprocussions that other English teachers have taught some apparently "questionable" titles. Comparison may also suggest that conditions for teaching English vary widely in our state. The number within parentheses represents the teachers who have used or recommended a particular title.

Bennett, THE HAWK ALONE (2)
Braithwaite, TO SIR WITH LOVE (1)
Capote, IN COLD BLOOD (2)
DuMaurier, REBECCA (1)
Fast, APRIL MORNING (2)
Hentoff, JAZZ COUNTRY (3)
Hinton, THE OUTSIDERS (2)
Kata, A PATCH OF BLUE (1)
Kaufman, YOU CAN'T TAKE IT WITH YOU (1)
Knowles, A SEPARATE PEACE (1)
Lee, TO KILL A MOCKINGBIRD (5)
Orwell, 1984 (1)
Sinclair, THE JUNGLE (1)
The movie version of QUO VADIS (1)

IMPLICATIONS OF THIS SURVEY OF 50 JUNIOR HIGH ENGLISH TEACHERS: Even with the reservations earlier cited, that the survey is small and probably untrustworthy in some details, that junior high school English teachers are likely to be touched by censorship less frequently than high school English teachers, some implications are clear:

(1) Censorship does exist as a problem in the junior high school. Certain books on both lists above may be questionable, but the overwhelming majority are defensible and those books we might debate may indeed be defensible within the contexts of a free reading program or individualized instruction or small group reading or varying reading interests and abilities;
(2) Too few junior high schools have written policies for handling censorship, and all junior high schools need policy statements;
(3) While a number of the junior high school English teachers surveyed feel that their principals would support them if censorship struck, too many either have no idea what would happen or feel (for whatever the reason) that administrators would not support them in any sense;
(4) Junior high school English teachers, similar to high school English teachers, are aware of the dangers of censorship, but they tend to fear censorship at a distance rather than fear censorship at home. A glance at items 21, 22, and 23 will indicate that junior high teachers of English see greater threat of censorship as the distance from home increases. As noted in the article in the February 1969 ARIZONA ENGLISH BULLETIN (p. 43), this type of it-can't-happen-to-me-only-the-guy-in-the-other-school syndrome is dangerous, particularly because it may delude teachers into believing that censorship happens only to other people.